

## How To...Barcode Compatible Mail

When we discuss direct mail, presort, barcodes, and wafer seals, one of the most popular questions we receive is "How do I make my mail barcode/automation compatible?" Fair question, but not always an easy answer. The answer to this question is actually, "It depends." So, our second most popular question is "Depends on what?" Barcode compatibility depends on several things, some of the more important ones, we'll touch on here.

To answer our original question, we will assume a letter size piece of mail (a letter is defined as being between 3 1/2 and 6 1/8 inches tall and between 5 and 11 1/2 inches wide). The aspect ratio (width divided by height) *must* be between 1.3 and 2.5. First thing is there needs to be sufficient room for the

address and barcode. As you look at your mail piece starting in the bottom right hand corner draw a box back to the left 4 1/2 inches and up

2 inches and that is the *minimum* area that needs to be left clear for an address and barcode. The reason for that area is that a label or address area is 3 1/2 inches wide and an inch tall.

The Post Office's barcode reading machines have additional requirements that must be met. The barcode must be at least 1/2 inch from either edge and at least 5/8 of an inch from the bottom of the mail piece. Additionally, the barcode must be at least 1/8 of an inch clear of anything right or left and 1/25 of an inch up or down.

Continuing with the address, to be barcoded and receive the discounts the address must be CASS certified and be a valid address. The barcode is

made of the Zip Code, Plus 4, delivery point, and a check digit. The CASS process adds the valid Plus 4 and delivery point for the check digit to be calculated. CASS software is updated every 60 days and delivery points as well as Plus 4s change as new addresses and routes are added.

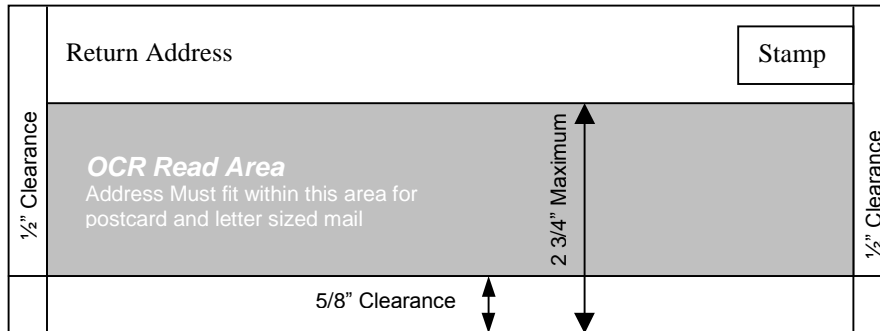
Having the address on the left-hand side of the piece, such as for a window envelope is fine. However, be cautious about the graphics that are used to the right of the address if there are any. Whether your address is shifted to the right or left or in the middle, be careful of placement of a return address. If the return address is in the Post Office's Optical Character Reader area (1/2 inch from the right edge, 5/8 up to 4 inches from the bottom) the zip code and address for the return may be scanned. If the barcode from the address is not

read, then the return address may be barcoded meaning that your mail may be returned rather than delivered as addressed.

If you are using a window envelope, the Post Office has some additional

requirements here. The barcode must be at least 1/8 of an inch from the edge of the window both right and left. It can be no closer than 1/25 of an inch to the window either up or down. The address must be visible and meet all the rules no matter how the letter inside shifts. The Post Office will even test the position by tapping the envelope on all sides to see how the letter moves.

If a mail piece is between 3 1/2 by 5 or 4 1/4 by 6 inches it must be at least 0.007 (7 points thick) to be barcode compatible. If the piece is larger than 4 1/4 by 6, then the minimum thickness is 0.009. We suggest you consult with your printer about specific papers that meet these regulations.



## Another PO Acronym, NCOA and what it means

The US Postal Services (USPS) estimates that between 25% and 30% of all addresses change each year. If you have not updated your address list in the last one or two years, you should consider having PostMark update your list with NCOA (National Change of Address). The costs are as low as \$75.00 and it only takes a few days. Once the special forms are signed to satisfy the Federal Privacy rules, your list is updated with the latest ZIP+4 and the addresses are standardized to the USPS recommended form. The list is then matched to the last 4 (four) years of address changes that have been submitted to the USPS. In addition to changes of address, data is available to indicate if an address is actually used to receive mail and if there has been a request from an address to not receive unsolicited mail. These can be used to reduce the costs of sending items to invalid locations or to people who prefer not to be contacted. Once all the matching is done, the list is available for updating your records or for a mailing.